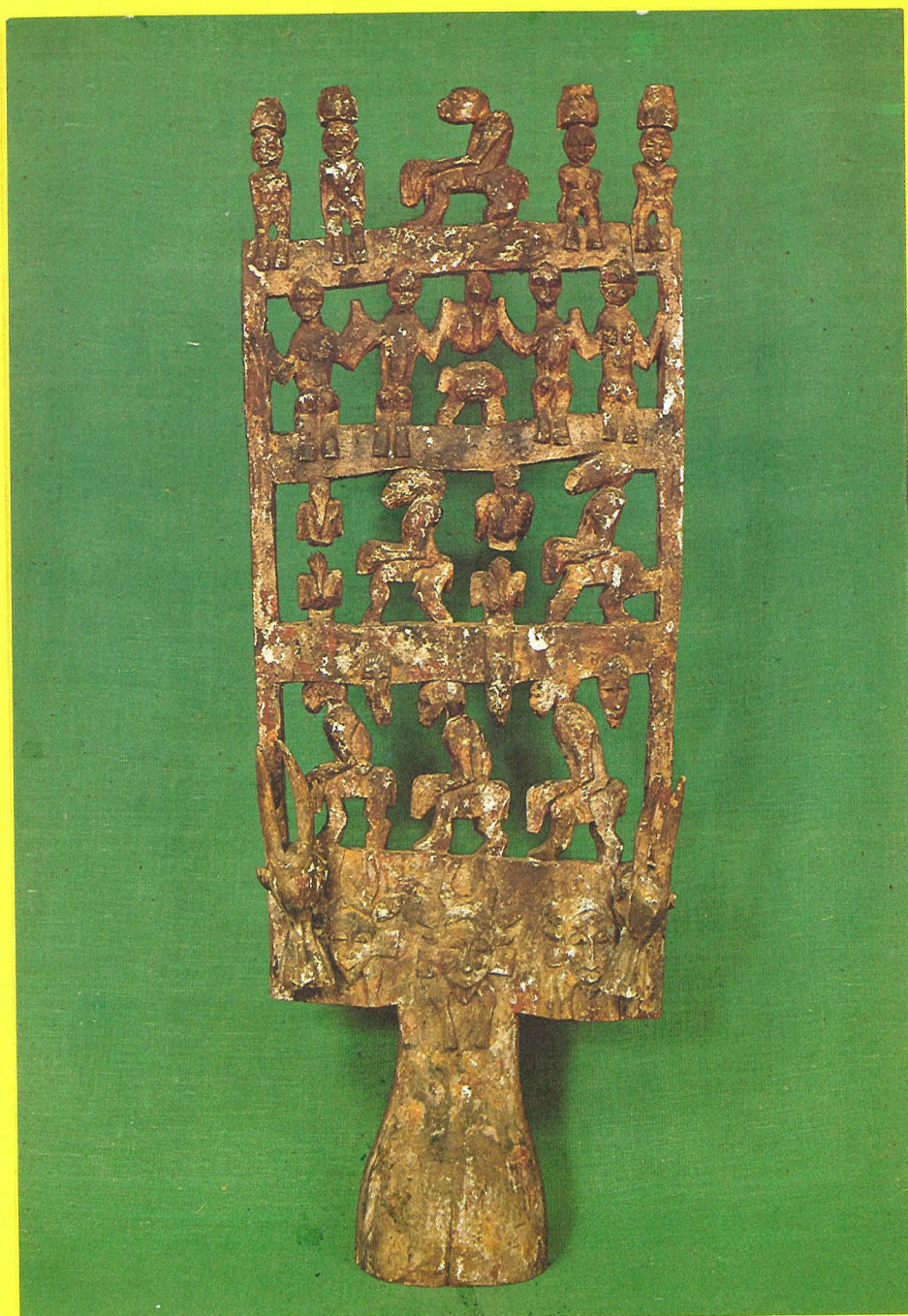


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MUNGER AFRICANA LIBRARY NOTES

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Issue #25

August 1974

THE ROLE OF KISWAHILI
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TANZANIA

George A. Mhina

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Introduction

In his pioneering study of the "Kisuaheli" language published in Tübingen in 1850, the Reverend J. L. Krapf stated his opinion as to the importance of the language "relative to the cause of science, commerce, and christianity" as follows: "We do not expect that the African mankind will ever perform considerable achievements in philosophy, or in the theoretical branches of science, but we believe, that it will cultivate the body or the practical point of civilisation and christianity." However, Krapf, who had begun his Kiswahili outline in 1844, conceded that "We must be surprized at the vigour, moveableness, tendency to clearness, and other grammatical phenomena, which this language manifests throughout."

Mr. George A. Mhina, the Director of Institute of Kiswahili Research, attached to the University of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania, gave the seminar at Caltech on which this publication is based. Mhina foresees a role for Swahili which Krapf would never have been able to contemplate--that of a distinct tool for creating a nation and energizing a people, and as a critical instrument in the economic and social development of his country.

In the weeks since the seminar was given, Kenya has suddenly moved to Swahili as a national language and is already using it in parliamentary debates. According to an article in West Africa (March 4, 1974), a 30,000 word Swahili dictionary (700 pages) has been published in Kinshasa, the work of a Zairean priest, Kajiga Balibutu. Jean-Pierre Hallet has recently supplied our library with a manuscript dictionary of Swahili-English-Efe (pygmy) containing 8,000 words.

Tanzania is the first new independent nation to decree as official an indigenous language, rather than English, French, Portuguese, or Spanish which have official status in most of black Africa. The cause of Swahili in Tanzania has been given impetus by the translations of Shakespeare by President Julius Nyerere himself.

The search for a unifying common language is a

recurrent theme. The first day after Kwame Nkrumah had been released from prison in Accra and the Convention People's Party seemed destined to take over from British rule, Nkrumah invited a number of people, including his shadow cabinet, to lunch. I remember well that day in 1951 when the party leaders present decided that there had to be a national language and that it would be Hausa. However, no one present could speak Hausa. And while he was in power, Nkrumah did not move for a national language. But the search continues. J. Sobotie recently made the suggestion (in West Africa, May 27, 1974) that the Nigerian government not consider Hausa as its national language, although it is widely spoken, but to refine "Pidgin English, like the Krio spoken by Sierra Leonans."

It is not coincidental that Tanzania was in the linguistic vanguard of other African nations. President Nyerere has long stressed self-reliance, national independence not just politically but economically, and a careful sifting of non-African values. It was his genius to proclaim that his goal for his fellow citizens was not just the "free DOM" I so often heard chanted in pre-independence Ghana, but Uhuru na Kazi--Freedom and Work.

Mwalimu Nyerere founded Africa's most effective grass roots political party, TANU--Tanzanyika African National Union--on Saba Saba twenty years ago. Saba Saba ("seven seven" or "the seventh day of the seventh month" in Kiswahili) is now a national holiday. Nyerere has consistently opposed materialism and has had clashes with fellow politicians who at first felt they should have several houses and large cars. Under Nyerere, Cabinet Ministers do not have private businesses. Large cars costing foreign exchange have to be justified as being in the national, not the ministers' personal, interest. Under President Nyerere 67 percent of the top level posts are now held by Tanzanians compared with only 10 percent in 1961. As the distinguished Africanist, Basil Davidson, observed, "Here at last we may be watching the consolidation of a Party and leadership which will be capable of rising above purely sectional or short-term interests, which know where they are going and why they should be going there. How rare in Africa!"

President Nyerere, unlike many African leaders who give themselves grandiloquent titles, prefers to be known

as "Mwalimu" or "Teacher" in Kiswahili. Kwame Nkrumah accepted the old Ghanaian title of "Osagyefo," which his idolators as well as his bitter critics have mistranslated as "Redeemer." Nyerere, with his personal modesty and Catholic background, would strongly discourage such a title for himself.

Nyerere's pragmatism and lack of affectation were clearly illustrated in an incident experienced by this editor in the 1950s, long before the Tanzanian leader had come to real power. Nyerere and I had just finished a television program for N. B. C. Our next move was to leave the downtown Chicago studios and go to my apartment in the University of Chicago neighborhood where we were to have dinner and Nyerere was to spend the night. Julius Nyerere asked how we would get there; I answered that it was about seven miles, so we would take an electric suburban train. While traveling in America, Nyerere said, he rarely got the chance to walk. Besides, walking gave him the time to think, so he wondered if it were possible for us to walk. After my initial surprise at his considering walking seven miles through a city, I said that we had time and it was possible, so we set off.

On the way we conversed occasionally, but a good part of the time he was pensively silent as we walked through the commercial Loop, its shabby industrial belt, up South Park Boulevard through the best part of the all-black ghetto, and finally into the University community of Hyde Park, where we arrived just in time for dinner. Later Nyerere said he had welcomed the opportunity to walk and to think and to digest an enormous number of impressions he had received on his first visit to the United States.

President Nyerere is the most erudite head of state in Africa, with the possible exception of President Senghor; the most conscious of history, with the possible exception of President Banda; and the most selflessly devoted to his country without desire for material returns, with the possible exception of President Kaunda. No one has been more successful in teaching self-reliance to his fellow citizens and instilling them with pride of their country. The promotion of Kiswahili by President Nyerere has been a key component in the fostering of self belief in Tanzanians. If no African leader has been completely successful in rural development,

President Nyerere has been most nearly so with his Ujaama villages. The reduction of the linguistic gap between rural peasant and urban sophisticate has been critical to his accomplishments. In the seminar presented here, George Mhina speaks as a deeply motivated supporter of President Nyerere and his efforts for promoting Tanzanian self-help and self-pride.

E. S. M.

MATHEMATICS AND CULTURE

Professor Robert Dilworth*

Let us consider the problem of translating an elementary mathematics text, written in English, into the language of a people with a different cultural background. As a first reaction some would probably judge this to be a difficult task since mathematics is abstract. However, a little reflection suggests that the situation could be exactly the reverse. For in nearly every culture occur the notions of "oneness," "twoness," "threeness," etc.; and elementary mathematics is built upon these basic notions. Starting with these building blocks it would appear to be a relatively straightforward task to formulate the ideas and processes of elementary arithmetic in the given language. Nevertheless, it is precisely at this level that difficulties may arise. Two examples will illustrate some of the problems involved.

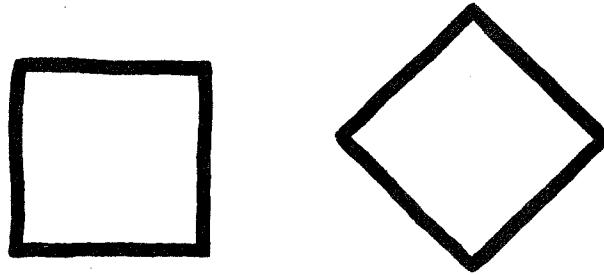
The concepts of "oneness," "twoness," etc., are properties of collections of objects. The standard English word for such a collection is "set." Now in Swahili there is a word which denotes a collection of inanimate objects and another word which denotes a collection of animate objects, but there is no word which is appropriate to describe a collection of inanimate and animate objects. For example, a teacher may wish to refer to the number of objects in the classroom. This collection will consist of the teacher, students, chairs, table, etc. Since the set contains both animate and inanimate objects no Swahili word will be appropriate to describe the collection. In fact, the translators of the mathematics texts developed by the African Mathematics Program found it advisable to introduce a new word, "seti," into Swahili to overcome the animate versus inanimate problem.

It is commonly recognized that languages may differ markedly in their ability to make distinctions. For example,

*Professor Robert Dilworth of our editorial board worked in East Africa for eight summers helping to create Kiswahili textbooks in mathematics for use in East Africa.

the language of a cattle raising people may contain many words to describe various shades of brown and be far more descriptive than English. But there may be no words to distinguish between the colors blue and green. The failure of a language to discriminate in a given area is of course associated with a lack of cultural interest in distinctions in that area. This may complicate the description of certain arithmetical processes in terms of the language, but it presents particular problems in the treatment of intuitive geometry which is also an important part of elementary mathematics.

The vast majority of children who use Kiswahili in schools live in rural areas and have a cultural background which is premarily rural. Consider their approach to these two geometric figures:



Most rural Tanzanian children will recognize the equivalence of the two figures. The fact that the second figure represents a rotation of the first is not an important distinction for them. On the other hand, American children and, I suspect, Tanzanian children in Dar-es-Salaam, whose environment is filled with horizontal and vertical lines, will usually recognize the two figures as being quite distinct. In fact, if they know the words, they will describe one figure as a "square" and the other figure as a "diamond." Thus it is clear that a direct translation of a statement on intuitive geometry which is meaningful for urban children may, for cultural reasons, fail to have the appropriate meaning for some Tanzanian children.

THE ROLE OF KISWAHILI IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TANZANIA

Mhina: The place Kiswahili has in the development of Tanzania is of interest to other countries besides Tanzania itself. A critical observer of progressive ideas and trends in Tanzania cannot have failed to note, especially with regard to the later years of our independence decade, the ever-growing sense of popular involvement in the development of Kiswahili and its role as a national language. This has been so evident that, when histories of the language are to be written, we shall not be far from the mark if, in trying to identify this particular period, we identify it as "the age of full commitment." For it is true that at no time in the long annals of the Swahili language has attention been given so fully, and energies spent so unsparingly in its service, than during the period in question. It is also a fact of much significance that for the first time Kiswahili is being taken seriously as an important factor in the social, cultural, political, and economic life of the people.

Back in the days of colonial administration, with its brainwashing policies, the idea of Kiswahili as a national language or even as a tongue of "Swahililand" had to go into full eclipse. To the majority of us the language meant no more than an old legacy accepted with indifference and with scant effort on our part to appreciate its literacy worth or its linguistic vigor. There was no emotion in the process of our "inheriting" it; we merely echoed impassionately the refrain of the ancients that "we have found our fathers" speaking it. That was all; but we had no feelings of pride or achievement, and thanks to the colonial mentality, there was no room for us to discover that Kiswahili was a beautiful and efficient language, possessing great merit and a greater future.

The dynamic changes taking place in Tanzania in the final years of the colonial period and the years that followed

Mr. Mhina wishes to thank Mr. Burhan Mkelle for giving his permission to adapt some ideas from Mr. Mkelle's paper on "Kiswahili in the Age of Full Commitment." -Ed.

militated against the indifference of the past and demanded a fresh and progressive attitude regarding the position of a language in a freedom-aspiring and developing country. While admittedly there has been a continuous activity in Swahili studies by experts and scholars of the language, who through their devoted study played an important part in the making of Swahili literature, it was soon realized that such leisurely and too "personal" efforts, which remained completely unconnected with the general trend of popular thought, would no longer satisfy the needs of the moment. The time and circumstances called for fuller and more committed efforts from the people in utilizing and developing the language.

Tanzania policy of educating the masses (bringing to the fore an adult education campaign), the acceptance of the ideals of the Arusha Declaration and its projection to the people, and the need to gear the educational system to be in line with the country's requirements and aspiration--all these ideas have been pointing at the Swahili language to take at last a meaningful part in the development of Tanzania. It may be equally true to say that these ideas by themselves continued to claim the attention of more people than had been the case in the past and were even putting pressure on the people of Tanzania to have a "re-thinking," not only on the language generally but also on their own part in the language's fate and future. Consequently, an interest in Kiswahili ceased to be a matter of personal choice and became a national priority. And to every "national" such an engagement would appear to be more a compulsion of conscience, stemming not only from natural pride but equally from his or her appreciation of the relevance of Kiswahili in the scheme of things in contemporary Tanzania.

The coming of Independence was a time for reappraisal in almost everything of weight and consequence, and this, naturally, could not exclude the people's language. The resultant new mood rejected totally the criterion which colonial masters had applied in evaluating the functions of a language. Prior to this change Kiswahili was far from being a "national" language in the real sense. It remained more of a showpiece, devoid of any reference to the needs and aspirations of the people who called it their own. The new mood demanded a true-to-fact definition of Kiswahili, and there was a need for a clear concept of what its purpose should be. In other words, an inquiry was needed into its "raison de etre" in a society such as ours engaged

in the grim struggle of liberation and in the quest for self-respect and self-reliance.

The realization that the language itself was part and parcel of the struggle had a tremendous effect on the people's estimation of Kiswahili. There was no doubt, therefore, regarding the formidable part which the language played in the days of political action in the fight for freedom. This also brings up another aspect of the subject--namely, the nature of Kiswahili as a rhetorical language, a subject which deserves special attention and study and which cannot be provided in one seminar. But if we agree that the purpose of rhetoric in language is to persuade and to convince, then we must be ready to assert that our language has functioned effectively as an organ of political persuasion.

Perhaps it is only now in retrospect that we can really see the magnitude of the job which had two particular considerations. First, the mentality and ideologies inherited from the heavy decades of European domination had to be vigorously swept away and ejected from the minds of the people, who had long accepted them as the essence of social and political reality by those who succumbed completely to the old belief on Kiswahili. The second and more difficult assignment was to instill new ideas about the world, to instill new standards of judgments and new approaches to problems--all of which required a strong medium of convictions and entailed an effort to dispense with the temptation on the part of the people to have a "look-back" at the past, which although essentially painful, becomes, after a time, emotionally nostalgic. I said the Swahili language took up the challenge with great success despite the fact that, at that time, its value generally to the colonials and the local elite was at a minimal position in relation to the language of the foreign administrators.

The feeling of servility and the defeatist attitudes imposed psychologically on the citizens of Tanzania to belittle their own language had to disappear gradually, to be replaced by a growing sense of importance and supremacy of Kiswahili, so that anything that had some connection with it was likely to gain immediate attention. The pace, too, towards its recognition and adoption in national and supranational activities took a more intense form. A great many people who never evinced an interest in the language were now to emerge as "committed" persons

showing serious concern and acting as the defenders of its intrinsic beauty. The struggle to liberate had to inspire an awakening, and this was not only in the purely political sphere but also in matters of language and culture. It was in the early independence years that the sign of this popular commitment to the affairs and destiny of the Swahili language was to be seen.

As years moved on in independent Tanzania, the future of the language brightened. Scholars and lovers of Kiswahili turned their purely academic interest into practical action. In 1967 the Tanzania Government, reflecting the will of its people, took the important step of establishing a National Swahili Council to direct and implement a general policy in all matters of Kiswahili. Concurrently, the country's centers of learning, mainly the University of Dar-es-Salaam through its Institute of Swahili Research, in concert with the high schools under the Ministry of National Education, started to gear themselves to give more attention to the teaching of Kiswahili and to switch to a program of intensive and continuous research into its literature and linguistics.

In terms of literary forms as well as literary expansion, the contemporary period is equally significant. For it was during this time that signs of tendency to depart from the traditional were to be discerned and the language began to seek new dimension in both poetry and prose. Whereas in the past Kiswahili had been mainly utilized as a vehicle of expression in the purely orthodox literary forms, we now see the language entering, for example, the field of dramatics, a role which was almost unknown in earlier literature. Furthermore, this new activity did not concern itself only with original Swahili plays written by playwrights on the spot; it also included translations by local scholars of foreign inspired dramas, such as the plays of Shakespeare and others. The play, apart from its great success as a medium, had also a special meaning in Tanzania society and civilization which comes from its strong relation to the ideology of the dance.

Equally important trends were taking place in the field of poetry, resulting in extensions to traditional patterns and the emergence of such forms as "Ngonjera." This is a special kind of socio-political poetry which has emerged within these last few years and is a typical product of the Swahili "age of full commitment."

And so, within the background of these stirring times, we see on the literary horizon new exponents of the virility of our language, among who are gifted writers, novelists, poets, singers, translators, and playwrights. And everywhere in the country--in the buses, in the factories, in the villages, in the offices--the people are discussing the role and development of Kiswahili, not as an item of gossip, but as one of the topics of national importance. It is this scene of committed action that the recorders of the Tanzania pageant will have to describe when they turn to the Swahili language and its development as a national phenomenon.

In the wide range of topics that comes within the purview of the commitment period, there is none perhaps that draws more interest and debate than that of the position of Kiswahili as a unifying force; or, in other words, the still mounting faith that the language has all the potentialities to be the lingua franca of East and Central Africa. This possibility has been discussed for many years and there is no doubt that there is much that justifies the claim. The evidence of centuries has proved the case. People from different parts of the areas concerned and coming from different ethnic groups were made able to communicate and understand each other through the Swahili language.

It is a doctrine that has many followers, and while their name is legion, the number includes no less a person than the "grand old man" of modern Swahili literature, the late Shaaban Robert, who, as far as Swahili is concerned, is our Shakespeare. Nearly fourteen years ago Shaaban Robert expressed his views frankly and convincingly on this exciting issue. At Makerere College in Uganda, he addressed a learned audience on Kiswahili as a unifying force in East Africa and had the following words to say: "East Africa has a lot of tribes and a variety of languages. Each person in the tribe has an inborn pride in the beauty and elegance of his or her own language. This is fair and just. Everyone must be proud of what he or she is, and what he or she possesses. But despite this pride there was always a desire for one race to have union with another, and there was no true force to achieve this except through a common language which alone has the necessary influence and potency to bring them all together." Posing the question as to the existence of such a language in East Africa, he gave the answer in favor of Kiswahili: "Yes. That language

is Kiswahili, if we must not isolate ourselves from one another and disappear as a nation or nations. Anyone in East Africa who denies himself or herself the knowledge of the Swahili language is casting aside and away an obvious advantage in life."

But possibly another word on this issue came in December 1971 from an eminently qualified international body, which was organized by the cultural section of UNESCO and met in Dar-es-Salaam. Eighteen African states attended this meeting of experts on African languages. Reporting on the meeting's progress, the Tanzanian paper, The Standard, stated, "Several delegates at the UNESCO conference urged that Kiswahili be adopted as the official regional language in Africa. Although there were voices at the meeting which called for caution, it was nevertheless abundantly clear that the submission was offered in all seriousness and was considered by many to be a practical and progressive suggestion."

No review of recent development in Kiswahili can be complete if it ignores what was taking place in revolutionary Zanzibar and the dramatic turn of events there, which affected the whole history of the language. Reflecting on this, one cannot help having doubts on the correctness of a statement made by the late Professor Whiteley in his book to the effect that "In the period since independence there has been no dramatic shift in the status of Kiswahili, indeed in some spheres there has simply been a logical and gradual extension of the areas in which the language was used."* I feel that events in Tanzania generally have proved the contrary. But whatever justification the eminent author may have had in making the comment, it cannot be maintained, at least as a correct record, of the position in Zanzibar after the 1964 revolution. The shift there was extremely dramatic. The revolution, itself a great drama, brought in changes that were equally swift and far-reaching in political sphere as well as in the field of language and culture. In Zanzibar, Kiswahili, soon after the revolution, was declared to be not only the national language but also the official one, replacing immediately the English language which had been the organ of government control for almost a century. This was no less than turning the tables on that foreign

*Whiteley, Wilfred, Swahili: The Rise of a National Language. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1969, p. 99.

tongue after its long and peaceful reign, and the restoration of our indigenous language. In terms of dramatic change, one could not think of a better example.

In mainland Tanzania, too, the move to increase the status of Kiswahili has been equally spectacular. In the highest Council of State, that is, in Parliament, the proceedings there have begun to be recorded and conducted in Kiswahili. The official gazette of Tanzania, which always in the past appeared in English, is now published fully in Kiswahili. The Tanzania Directory, a government publication which gives details of ministers and senior officials in the various ministries, together with their duties and responsibilities, was translated into Kiswahili, being a necessary step in initiating the policy of using the language fully in all ministries and departments.

Q: Does Hansard not come out in English anymore?

Mhina: It comes in both, because anyone is free to use English if he wants. A campaign to have all road signs and public notices appear in Kiswahili instead of in English is being undertaken. Efforts which started some years ago to provide a shorthand system in Kiswahili were finally successful and a version based on Pitman's shorthand was made available in a book form. The need for a local shorthand system was seen as a national corollary to the decision to use Kiswahili in place of English in all offices and places of work.

The Institute of Swahili Research continues to be an important cog in the wheel of endeavor. Working on its own right as a center for research and dissemination of Kiswahili, it also continues to give considerable help and cooperation as a member body of the Swahili National Council. The Institute has been encouraging new writers in Kiswahili, not only to give them useful criticism and advice, but also to help, in some deserving cases, in actual plans for publication. Another important assignment in the Institute of Swahili Research is that of providing technical and scientific terms. This is going ahead and with more success than was originally expected, being no doubt due to the very sensible and convincing manner in which new words were being formed to explain scientific and technical concepts. The need to revive interest on the study of old Kiswahili writing which formed such a great part of our inherent literature was not overlooked, and the Institute, cooperating with the Department of

Kiswahili, put greater stress on the study of poetry and more intensive research. This latter part of the work involved the study of old Swahili manuscripts, mostly written in Arabic script. To enable this storehouse of Swahili literature to be available to more people than has been possible in the past, the Institute is now engaged in transliterating this mass of old material in ancient Arabic script into the Roman script, this being partly a means for wider dissemination and at the same time an attempt to offer better facilities for more detailed study of the language.

At the University the decision to start a degree course in Kiswahili was a further step in the policy of exalting the status of the language. In addition, the move acted as a considerable booster to the language in proving its suitability for higher studies. The graduation day at the University of Dar-es-Salaam in 1971 was a landmark in the history of the language. For the first time the University departed from its usual procedure of conducting the annual degree awarding ceremony in English. The congregation, attended by the Chancellor of the University, was thoroughly a Swahili ceremony, and this also stressed the increasing importance of the language.

Q: Dr. Nyerere was then the Chancellor?

Mhina: Yes, and he is the Chancellor today. It was a national appeal which deserved the response of every Tanzanian to take his or her part in the general effort towards the development of our language. Certainly the time is now. The intellectual in Tanzania has achieved sufficient stature in education and understanding to be in a position to enrich and improve the Swahili language and make it a really modern and progressive one.

This is perhaps the greatest linguistic issue facing us at the present time. And inevitably it brings up the talk about the inadequacy of Kiswahili as if that was a "special badge" for the language alone. This is the song we continually hear in exaggerated tones mostly from foreign sources or even from some of our own folk. If it was meant to break up the morale of those who have faith in the language, it cannot do much at the present stage of popular and serious involvement; in fact, it only serves to whet the edge of endeavor that is reflected by the

various activities and projects which engage the attention of the Tanzanian people. The lovers of the language are perfectly aware of the great challenge which the language has to face. But with this awareness there is also the certainty that the challenge is being squarely faced as a result of commitment to its improvement as a national language. African contribution to the progress of thought, art, and science depends upon the success of the attempt to adapt African languages to the medium of its expression.

Scholars in recent years have proved also that the language has adequate and efficient vocabulary to express the thoughts and ideals of people of other nations. In earlier days activity in the field of translation was generally restricted to colonial government manuals and low grade school books. But the translators of the commitment, fully taking up the challenge and armed with the confidence that comes from national identity, scorned the baseness of dealing with materials of a pedestrian nature, and, to prove the strength and richness of Kiswahili, went right up to the higher flights of fancy and great literature. In this exercise, we could have wished for no better and able "trend maker" than our own President Mwalimu Nyerere of the United Republic of Tanzania, for it was he who tackled with phenomenal success the difficult and nerve-wracking job of translating Shakespeare, thus demonstrating conclusively the wealth of the Swahili vocabulary and its ability to express adequately the philosophical and literary reflections of writers and thinkers of the so-called advanced languages.

The myth that supports the idea that one particular language is greater or more important than another has long been exploded in modern radical thinking. All that we know is that different languages have different merits, and similar--and even dissimilar--points of beauty; and that the importance of each language is relative to conditions and circumstances around it.

One Swahili scholar once said, "No one race or nation may claim that its own attainments in all branches of philosophy, art, and science can exhaust the possibilities of human accomplishment. On the contrary, it is becoming more generally recognized that each nation and race has its own special contribution to make to the intellectual and spiritual life of humanity."

In terms of the Tanzania situation, the meaning from that quotation is quite clear: that our nation is on a level with others, and definitely has a contribution to make to the intellectual and spiritual life of man. And, if that contribution is to be a genuine one, it will have to be transmitted through our language.

But it is here that we should be very careful of the danger of understanding the size and seriousness of the work ahead. For the genius of English literature was not the result of mere inspiration; it called for greater sacrifices and extremely hard work from the English people in developing their language. Only on realizing this in full can we be justified to take strength from the following comment: "A few hundred years ago English was regarded as a barbarous language and no more suitable as a medium of higher thought than Swahili is now. But it has proved itself capable of unlimited development and enrichment and there is no reason why Swahili should not have a similar future before it."

Godfrey Radebe, Inspector of Schools in Durban: I'm very grateful to George for his paper, because the problems they have come across in Tanzania are the problems that we have come across in our country. As he has put it, the language is part of the people's culture, and there is a tendency, when people are exposed to a foreign culture, to assume that then things are not good and not wholesome. And it is unfortunate when they also look down on their own language.

Now, this is the attitude that is found apparent among children where the mother tongue we observe to be closer than any language. Hence, it is relegated to a position of inferiority and those who have managed to assimilate a foreign language (because you can create for yourself a better economic situation)--then your mere understanding of that language is a sign of improvement and embellishment of yourself, which is not really the case. But at home we have found that when you go back to the people who speak the mother tongue, they are the most conscientious, the most refined people, the most godly--those who have not been exposed to any "civilization." There have been foreign influences and there is a tendency in people to justify and categorize them and lately to call the Christian people amakholwa, meaning "people who are hypocrites."

Q: That is a dual word for hypocrite and Christian?

Radebe: Well, yes. When they use the word "amakholwa" they know what type of people this is. So it is used in a spiteful way to ridicule and so on. It is used in a scornful way. Now this has happened with time. Before that there came the era of the Christian sociological aspect, with political overtones. The people tended to think, and the situation encouraged the people to feel, that if you have this knowledge of the official language, you are likely to be promoted. Where you find everybody had to learn Afrikaans, it was just forced down the throat. You get a pass in Afrikaans, then you are likely to rise, be you white or black. Even the best man couldn't get promotion and could see that there will be no promotion in the departmental offices unless he speaks Afrikaans. "Hy was nie tweetalige nie."

Q: Does that mean he was not bilingual--in English and Afrikaans?

Radebe: Yes, not bilingual. So these political situations count, and I think what George says is the same. In Tanzania the language comes to its own because politically it is a sort of revolution. But now from a purely educational point of view, we have found it best (much as the politicians for political reasons, I think) to bring in the use of the instruction of the mother tongue right down to the bottom of Standard 3, the fifth year of schooling of a child. In our case it was at the beginning of this year, when a lot of the children and teachers are ready for the use of English as the medium of instruction, we, the education experts, affirmed that teachers were not prepared. The children are not prepared to use English. These people show that they can change.

Q: If we are to understand you correctly, these people are good teachers in Zulu, but they have not had enough experience with English, so...

Radebe: For political reasons the problems of having an official language are involved. Students are told, "I am sorry but you have to stay out." But I fear the results are going to be disastrous. The children are, conceptionally, at a loss and the learning process is more farcical than anything else. Now, we use the official language because it is a veneer. You

find in school in a class situation that your principal may rigidly insist that the teachers and the children when they play should play in the official language so that they can be more exposed to this. It is part of the Christian influence also. They say, "Now stand in a straight line." So they say we should use the official language outside. You tend to have more control over children because they are less free. In fact, if you insist they should use the official language, English, through play time it is not good for their creativity.

Another problem is that if the medium of instruction is English, a teacher may not be able to explain as easily in English. He may understand it but he may not be able to explain it easily to the children. So he switches over to Zulu. And these are teachers who get the best results.

Mhina: It is really an important point here. We changed over in 1967 to education conducted in Swahili. But what used to be the case is that we had Swahili in the first five classes, all of these were conducted in Swahili. And when they came to the sixth year, the medium switched over to English. Of course, this was in the English schools. I started with English as the medium of instruction. But you see, the primary school teacher for many years has been a person whose whole academic qualification is limited: primary education plus two years teachers' training. To ask this man, who has had English for about four or five years--basic English--to communicate or to impart the knowledge that he has to the children is a helluva big job. You can't go into his classroom expecting the teacher to speak very fluently. I was in this situation myself whereby an education officer came into the classroom expecting me to teach Tanzanian geography in English. I had to struggle to speak English properly, because if I made any grammatical mistakes I was criticized. The subject matter that I was putting across to the children was not considered. When the change came we had been used to English as a medium of instruction and parents and other people thought it a prestigious language. People asked, "Why are we going to lower the standards of our education by introducing Swahili to primary school--English is the language?"

Q: Do you feel Swahili raised the level of instruction?

Mhina: We had been indoctrinated that English is the language, the master language, that it is prestigious. When you say that the language of instruction should be Swahili in primary education, there was the feeling that you were going to be a less important person and you were lowering the standard of education. But actually, it is the opposite. It is in fact upgrading the standard of primary education. Because once we introduced Swahili as the medium of instruction, the children in the classroom were fully participating in the lessons because they could express themselves right from the beginning. And the teacher with the limited knowledge of English also found himself in a much more flexible situation. He could also express himself properly and because of the situation the classroom became more and more lively.

Q: Was this true in all parts of the country or primarily in the coast? I take it as you move from the coast the quality is not quite as good. Do the levels of Swahili differ in various parts of Tanzania?

Mhina: That is right. But I will say Swahili now is spoken and understood by almost everybody--the majority of the people do understand and speak Swahili. There is no dialect. And the decree that the medium should be Swahili applies to every school in the country. Our education system is controlled by the Ministry of Education, so we find actually more and more Swahili participation. We hope that in the near future we shall start introducing Swahili in the secondary schools where we are now teaching it as a subject only.

Q: From what grade is Swahili used as a medium of instruction?

Mhina: From grades 1 to 7 all subjects are taught in Swahili. In teacher training colleges the medium is Swahili. The Department of Swahili was teaching Swahili as a language at the University, and general linguistics was taught as a joint subject by the Departments of Linguistics and of Swahili. But then the students were complaining that they wanted to go deeper into Swahili, therefore they find no reason why they shouldn't be taught linguistics in Swahili. So from this July, the department of Swahili is also going to teach linguistics in Swahili. Swahili is a subject right from primary

to university, and the medium of instruction at primary level. At the secondary level, then it is a subject. It is a medium of instruction only in political education. You cannot teach political education in a foreign language. You have to teach it in Swahili, because we feel we can express our own economic-social development in terms of political terminologies that you used.

Q: Well, the very fact that you use the word "uhuru na kazi"--"freedom and work"--which is different from freedom in other countries.

Mhina: Many teachers are using Swahili in teaching geography and history. I don't know whether you have read the President's small books on education?

Q: You mean the President disseminating his political philosophy in Swahili?

Mhina: This is what I'm saying--we are in a revolution. The future in development of our education must come from the people themselves involved. When we were using English as a medium, a lot was not relevant to the situation. So we had to make our own books. The terrible thing is that I never learned the history of my district or my region of Tanga. During our time which is not very long ago, even the history of Tanganyika was taught for only a few days. That small. Then it is finished.

Q: But you know every county in England, though!

Mhina: Oh, yes. Sussex, Essex, right down the line. Every little bit. Every railroad station in Britain, the working of the House of Commons. But if you ask me to name a famous chief of Tanzania, I wouldn't know. If you asked me who were the African heroes in Tanzania, I wouldn't know. I would know about Sir Walter Raleigh. We studied about the American War of Independence and the Spanish Armada. Now pupils study Tanzania first. To make issues meaningful, we started making our own books. Primary school teachers and teacher trainers worked together and in two to three months produced course books for Grades 1, 2, and 3. To catch up with our history, mathematics, and geography, teachers have been making their own books.

Another thing which maybe during my talk I have not emphasized is a phenomena in Tanzania. When we talk of Swahili as a tool for development, one also has to take into account the present developments, which we happen to call revolution in Tanzania. We are having radical developments in education, and in terms of reviving and developing culture, and in the economy. There is a revolution in every aspect which tends to upgrade the position of people of Tanzania. Another thing which I have not mentioned here is that although Swahili was taught many years, there was only a small percentage of the population who spoke the language. Call it a small elite. And because we are mostly concerned with the message--particularly the government is concerned with developing the welfare of the masses--we feel that it is appropriate to use a language which is understood by these people. If an agricultural officer from Harvard or a lawyer from Oxford or Cambridge goes to Tanzania and says that he is a U.K. or American qualified graduate and the only language that he can speak fluently is English, he will be of no use. Because we feel that anybody who had the privileges of being given such an education should be able to share that knowledge with the people. And in Tanzania the State pays the tuition and a graduate must share the knowledge with the people, because it is public. It is these people who have educated him.

Q: You are speaking of someone from Tanzania who has gone to a university abroad?

Mhina: Yes, or to Dar-es-Salaam.

Q: Do most foreign advisers learn enough Swahili to be effective or do they not most often operate at the ujaama level? How many Chinese on the TanZam Railway, for example, learn Swahili as a method of communication?

Mhina: This is a very important question. People may think that we are inclined to close the door to people from outside, people who are willing to come and help us. In fact, this idea is contrary. At this moment of our development we need many experts in knowledge from different parts of the country. We are not saying that everybody who wishes to come to Tanzania to advise us from a certain aspect or to help

in certain problems must have the knowledge of Kiswahili. But we also say it is advisable for him or her to have some kind of knowledge of Swahili for their own benefit. Because we feel that, however expert a person may be, he has also something to learn from the people during the time he is in Tanzania. If you really want to learn more during the short time that you will be in Tanzania, I think the best thing is to be able to talk to ordinary people in the streets, and if you don't communicate, if you won't be able to communicate in Swahili, then it becomes very difficult for you to discover that there is something that you can take back home. So you find so many groups, we have several groups coming to stay over various periods--we have Scandinavians--Swedes, Danes, Norwegians--they come in great numbers as volunteers and experts. The Chinese, British, and Americans as well. Now I'm talking about the Scandanavians, the Canadians--what they try very often, when they know there is a group going to East Africa, they conduct some preliminary Swahili courses in their own countries. We find in Sweden, for example, there is a place called Vestaras; there is a place also in Norway, there is a place in Holland. In these places they train people who come to East Africa about Africa, about the country where they are going to work, and about the language. They give them some intensive courses for about two months before they leave the place. Two years ago I worked with groups from Finland, Norway, and Sweden. They have some sort of what you call "crash courses" for another month before they disperse into their respective jobs. Because they are not homogeneous groups. Some are engineers, some may be nurses, or agricultural experts, and so on. So as far as your question whether we demand that they must know Swahili, actually we are not forcing them to.

Q: Do they really need it to be effective?

Mhina: Yes. Take an example of a lady who is maybe a health educator. If you really want to help the people, you must talk to them and advise them on nutrition and so on. The poor mamas don't speak another language to them except Swahili, because it is impractical for people to use one of our local ethnic languages. I didn't answer your question which you asked me about the Chinese. It quite applies.

The Chinese in effect have always been very good about learning Swahili before they come to Tanzania.

Q: The number of Chinese is substantial. They stay by themselves quite a bit. Do they operate by everyone learning some Swahili?

Mhina: Not necessarily everyone. What I want to point out here concerning the Chinese is that they are practical people. This is a big asset of the Chinese whatever people say about them. In training local people to do something, or in trying to undertake a special project, they are practical people. They teach very often through practice. If someone is an engineer of some kind, an expert, he doesn't go into the factory or stand by the worker to tell him "Now, o.k., take that thing, put it in a circuit over there," something of that sort, what you have been used to. This is the custom--the European system, where the boss comes in a suit or in a white collar sort of position and his thing is just to direct and not even touch whatever he wants you to touch. The Chinese say, "O.K. We're going to establish a textile industry." So they start by working together with the people. "How many people do you want?" They say, "We want 500 people. We want 10 people to work here, with this machine; we want another 10 people to work over there in another machine." So we find within one year, we actually don't need them anymore.

Q: But in their verbal communication, to the extent that they use it, is it primarily in Swahili?

Mhina: Yes. That is why I have said that it is best if they know Swahili because, after all, they work with the people. So, as far as the Chinese are concerned, this is what you really appreciate. That is why we sometimes call it the "Chinese Railway" as a nickname, although we know it as the TanZam Railway.

Radebe: This business about a mother tongue is more than skin deep. Some people think that because you have been absorbed into another culture and speak English fluently, that you never speak your mother tongue. The idea is that if a Zulu goes overseas, he doesn't speak Zulu when he comes home. We need English, but we also need our mother tongue.

Mhina: Although we are using more and more Swahili, we shall continue to teach English for years to come because we live in an English world and cannot afford to isolate ourselves. We are looking into better methods of teaching English as a second language. About four years ago we also introduced French and it is doing well at the secondary school level. French is necessary because we have to communicate with our fellow Africans abroad and so, unfortunately, some people have to learn still another foreign language.

Q: Is your French interest because of your long western border with French-speaking countries?

Mhina: Yes, but we can speak Swahili with them.

Q: Americans do not emphasize learning other languages.

Mhina: I think it may only be a question of languages like German, Spanish, and something of that sort. But I would like to let you know that one could not have envisaged a really serious study of African languages in Europe or America, because, historically, some centuries ago, the language experts divided the world of languages into two major groups: the so-called civilized languages and the so-called primitive languages. The civilized languages consisted of all those languages of Europe (when you say Europe you take America along) which are considered as carrying culture because the people were considered to be cultured. And the languages which fall under the primitive group were all the languages of Africa and the languages of Arabia, India, and South America. And the experts considered it useless to study these languages because they said they had very little vocabulary. After all the people who used these languages were considered to have a different kind of medulla oblongata, some sort of different kind of brain. This sort of exaggeration took place for many years. We give respect to the missionary who has done a wonderful job in Africa and who educated us. But sometimes they did some harm to our culture. As far as Swahili is concerned, the missionaries did quite a lot as individuals.

Q: You speak of a century of Swahili in development.

What was the German attitude from 1885 to 1918?

Mhina: The Germans didn't do much with Swahili because they concentrated on the local languages as a means of spreading Christianity. Of course, a missionary like Krapf, who wrote one of the first dictionaries in Kiswahili, knew a lot about the language. But it is remarkable that one can only think of perhaps three words in Swahili which have been borrowed from German. There is "shule" for "school," which is now used in Kenya Swahili, although in Zanzibar, which was also so long under British colonial rule, the Swahili word "skuli" is obviously derived from English. And then there is the German "hele" for two cents. But we have far more loan words from the Portuguese, such as "meza" in Kiswahili for "table" and "nanasi" for "pineapple." You know, people do speak of Kiswahili as being so like Arabic, even though I said the words are only 15 percent of Arabic origin and more loan words come from English. The current trend is towards more words from Bantu languages, such as "bunge" for "parliament."

Radebe: It would be "bunga" in Xhosa.

Mhina: And we have "ikulu" for "State House."

Q: How about teaching Swahili in America?

Mhina: There is still a great potentiality in the teaching of African languages in America. Speaking on my part, especially Swahili, since it is the language spoken in the largest part of Africa. America is starting very, very well, indeed, as far as teaching Swahili is concerned. And we, in Tanzania, all the time are told this and see universities and colleges in the U.S. vigorously researching and doing some teaching of this language. And this is even before the black movement. So it is my hope that in order to enhance more international human understanding, more and more of these African languages will be taught in American universities. And not only in the universities--in the secondary schools. And the idea is to try to bring the two people closer together by studying the language. Language is studied as part of a culture.

Q: You spoke of Swahili as the lingua franca of East and Central Africa. First of all, how far do you envision the general area of Swahili as a primary language? And secondly,

is the Tanzanian government subsidizing this? I mean, do you invite students from Zaire, for example, or from northern Zambia? Is this an active movement to expand the use of Swahili with Dar as a center?

Mhina: Actually we don't have many universities. Our center is a young institution. We are not subsidizing Swahili.

Q: How far do you reasonably expect Swahili to expand? Do you expect that it may be the national language of Kenya?

Mhina: You see, though I have been talking about Tanzania, I hate to commit myself on certainties about other neighboring countries. Tanzania has made this as a national language, but Swahili is spoken not only in Tanzania. It is spoken in part of Congo, in Uganda, in Kenya, and it is spoken in northern Zambia and in northern Malawi. And, also, off the shore it is spoken in the Comoro Islands.

Q: Is Comoro Swahili perfectly intelligible to you?

Mhina: It is intelligible but there are problems.

Q: Is it because they speak it with a French accent?

Mhina: Not really. It doesn't have a French accent. The Swahili there is more towards the Lingala of the Congo.

Q: Swahili is pretty widely spoken. I've used it to ask directions as far west as Kisangani.

Mhina: Yes, and in southern Somalia they speak Swahili, too.

Q: Does that verge on becoming more Arabic there?

Mhina: Yes, there is a lot of Arabic influence this way. But because the language is spreading over a large place, like inland, there is a tendency to use more and more of the local vocabulary.

My Institution is primarily concerned with the national use of Swahili. We are establishing a standard language

over this zone. To go further as far as your question is concerned, many people around us are relying on the Institute of Swahili Research to provide information on the development of the standard language. The Institute Board, the Board of the Institute of Swahili Research, has members from Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. In fact, very recently, a Uganda member of the Inter-University Council--not of the Board of the Institute but the Inter-University Council of the three district universities--came up with a recommendation, a proposal that the Institute of Swahili Research, which is now under the University of Dar-es-Salaam, should be upgraded and serve as an East African Institution. This recommendation had already been approved by the University of Dar-es-Salaam which is the caretaker of the Institute and the government of Tanzania. It is now being sent to the East African Assembly for the other two countries to give their consent.

Q: And presumably also financial support?

Mhina: Yes. Once it is agreed to establish it, then the Institute is to be run on an equal basis. Memberwise in the Board, and also financially, each country will have contributed to the Institute. So as such you will find that it is gaining more ground and it is becoming regional.

Q: You spoke of the dramatic change in the revolution of Zanzibar in 1964, and how that has affected Swahili. I did not understand entirely what this change consisted of linguistically.

Mhina: Until the day of revolution, English was the language. When Karume came in, everything was conducted in Swahili. Plate numbers of cars, which have always been government cars, used to have "GT" meaning "government transport." They changed that to "SZ," which stands for "Government of Zanzibar" in Swahili. The mainland has followed suit, and now has "SI" on Tanzania government plates.

Q: Do you anticipate that the standard of Swahili in Zanzibar will have an impact on the mainland? Where are new words being coined? Can this ever be entirely controlled by the government?

Mhina: The Institute for which I am working has been given

the responsibility of working together with the National Council of Swahili to see that we develop standard Swahili. We do research into the other languages which are related to Swahili, also Swahili dialects, and make sure that we are aware of the new concepts and new words coming into our language. We assimilate this by making dictionaries, and by making grammars, of course, in our teaching of the language in the schools at the university level. The history of the standard language is also very interesting. The standard language is called the Zanzibar dialect. But actually, when you talk about the Zanzibar dialect some people may think that it is a language that is spoken right in Zanzibar. It is similar, but it is a dialect which has been spoken around this way in Zanzibar and which had been introduced in schools in Zanzibar itself and in the mainland. By that time the schools were run by missionaries, and the people who made the primers and textbooks for the children were missionary fathers. And there was a Swahili Committee, founded by the three governors of East Africa, which advised them on the development of the language in East Africa. So the Swahili teaching which had got into the books, in fact, is now what is considered to be the standard Swahili. Though originally we talked in the Zanzibar dialect, if you compare what is the standard now, you will find that it has slipped from its original position. And this is inevitable when you have a living language, a language which is growing.

Q: When do you date Swahili as beginning? Was it spoken in Kilwa in the 15th century, for example?

Mhina: Yes, or even in the 10th century--around about that time. Remember, I told you historically I'm not really good. The question of history of the language is very controversial. Unfortunately, those who wrote about the language did not have proper records. Maybe they weren't interested in the history of language. They were people who were explorers who came to Mombasa one day. They found somebody at the road-stopping, and then they say "I met a group of people who are speaking this or that." The historians on the language say that the language came about when Arab traders came from the north, and then some Bantu groups moved from the West--some claim from somewhere in the Camerouns. They moved eastward, and when

they came to the East Coast they came in contact with the Arabs and Persians from the north. The mixing of the languages of these two peoples created Swahili. But this has actually been disputed. This explanation was given because Swahili has got about 15 percent of words of Arabic. And this figure was taken a long time ago; maybe now it is changed.

So, we're now having a controversy. People are trying to prove that Swahili had been there even before the coming of the Arabs--that Swahili is an African language.

Q: Is there a political reason for this controversy?

Mhina: No, there is not. Discussions are taking place at universities. They are trying to prove this by research findings.

Q: Fifteen percent Arabic isn't very much.

Mhina: Well, I think so, when you talk about vocabulary. If you're going to say Swahili is Arabic because of the 15 percent, then I can easily dispute that, because I know English is a hybrid of so many languages.

Q: Could you give us any figures on how much Kiswahili is now used in broadcasting and in newspaper circulation compared to English? Are there trends, one way or the other?

Mhina: Radio Tanzania has a number of programs, but the main ones are the external series and the local series. The major language used in Radio Tanzania is Swahili. So the radio is practically dominated by Swahili. The newspapers, the same. We have a national newspaper called the Daily News. You subscribe to it. It is the national government English paper. Then we have the Swahili papers--we have a Sunday Swahili paper, some daily newspapers in Swahili.

Q: What do you call the Sunday newspaper?

Mhina: Mzalendo.

Q: Actually, "mzalendo" means "to get back to something," doesn't it?

Mhina: It is a new word. "Mzalendo" means a citizen, but the word for citizen is "mwananchi." "Mwana" means a child, "nchi" means country--"a child of the country." But "mzalendo" means "citizen of the country." This one has a different connotation, meaning "one who is ready to die for his country."

Q: Patriot?

Mhina: That's right. Another paper is The Uhuru. There are two papers; The Uhuru and The Mzelendo are TANU party papers.

Q: So the total circulation of Swahili would be far greater than the total circulation of English?

Mhina: Yes. Again you would have to take account of why, because many people are illiterate. But there is a great number of people now reading these papers like Uhuru and Mzalendo because they know how to read and write. The circulation of the Daily News, which is an English paper, is limited to the elite.

The literacy rate is improving now. We have a massive literacy campaign. The government is spending a lot of money on this as part of the revolution.

Radebe: You would be a good man to bring over to KwaZulu to talk on how the local languages, the mother tongue could be used. To edify and to cherish and embellish a number of ideas.

Q: Isn't Mr. Mhina's attitude towards mother tongue generally the point of view of the South African government?

Radebe: Yes. The South African government supports the Tanzania approach.

Q: I was fascinated by what you said about Ngonjera.

Mhina: Ngonjera is a new kind of poetry which has come during this time we call the time of full commitment to the language. It is a time which has come with the greater political awareness. The colonial power for many years denied our cultural existence. What should we do to upgrade ourselves to

improve our standard of living? This particular poetry has come up with the great consciousness of change which is taking place. It is unique in such a way that it is sort of a political poetry. So if, for example, the President or a minister or somebody is coming to open the meeting, they start acting this Ngonjera as a sort of an entertainment, but during that time they are telling a message.

Q: These are people like players who would be doing this?

Mhina: So a dialogue can go on about any subject, say, the Ujaama villages. Then they say "Now, please, you have no job in this town. What are you doing here loitering? Why don't you go back to the villages?" And they answer, "Now, how can I go to the villages? There's a lot of pleasure here, cinema, no dancing, or everything is here, it is all right. Why tell me to go to the villages where there is no life?" Then they say, "Oh, yes, there is no life, but there is no job here. Now look, where do you stay?" "I am staying with my sister." "What do you do there? You are exploiting her." The idea is, say, for example, that the person is being useless. If you don't have a job in the town, you are exploiting others, maybe your relatives. "The land is there, a lot of land--rich land. Go and dig the land. That is something. Go and join your people and your neighbors in your villages and do something to develop or to produce the food. The food that you eat here is being produced by them." Then it usually ends by his saying, "I will work. I have seen the light. I have seen the sun. I will go to the village."

Q: Is this all said in meter? Does it rhyme?

Mhina: Yes, it must follow the special rules of Swahili poetry.

Q: It must not be easy to write.

Mhina: It is not easy, because it is written strictly by the rules. You find this method works very well, because it has brought in consciousness even with the Standard 1, the small children. I mean politically even a small kid in Tanzania can speak confidently about politics.

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